

## **4. STRATEGIC PLAN**

This section provides a Strategic Plan for the revitalization and redevelopment of the Arlandria commercial district during the interim period (within the next five years or beyond) during which the market is strengthened in support of the Safeway-Datatel site project. The primary purpose of the plan is to provide a strategy for enhancing the competitiveness and marketability of the Arlandria commercial district to the point that the area becomes attractive for the type of major redevelopment envisioned by the community.

Specifically, this plan provides a niche marketing strategy that focuses on ways to increase the destination marketing potential for Arlandria and attract the recommended mix of stores. The plan also provides management and redevelopment recommendations that augment or further define those already made in the Task Force and Work Group reports. Finally, the plan provides an Action Plan with some of the specific steps that should be taken to implement this interim revitalization strategy.

### **Niche Marketing Strategy**

A primary purpose for this market analysis has been to assist in defining an appropriate market identity and interim marketing strategy for Arlandria / Upper Potomac West. The following marketing strategy is designed based on the findings from the market potentials analysis, as well as on the objectives, needs, and priorities of the community and area businesses.

#### **Marketing Concept and Identity**

Input from the community Task Force Report, City staff, residents, consumers, businesses, and other stakeholders all recognize the “diversity” of the Arlandria commercial area as one of its primary strengths. Diversity is a word that can be used in so many ways that it tends to lose its meaning. In an attempt to define the term, the Work Group report refers to “cultural, economic, and social diversity,” and further discusses “ethnic” restaurants and stores.

**Latin-American Community.** The marketing of urban commercial districts should not be generic, but should also not place arbitrary “themes” or standards that do not necessarily strengthen an existing or potential economic opportunity. In the case of Arlandria, there is a clear existing strength recognized by a large number of consumers that relates to the area’s large Latin American community and sense of place. This strength also presents a potential marketing opportunity because:

1. The Hispanic market is the most concentrated and fastest growing ethnic market in the trade area, and now represents a significant portion of overall expenditure potential. The Asian population is also growing and becoming a more important target market, but is much more dispersed throughout the larger region.
2. The Hispanic market includes middle- and high-income households, whose expenditure potentials have not yet been fully tapped in Arlandria or elsewhere in the greater Washington, D.C. metropolitan area.
3. Latin American culture is familiar and attractive to a broad range of Americans of all ethnic backgrounds and income groups.
4. There is a large, vibrant, and successful base of Latino-owned or themed retailers, restaurants, travel agencies, and other businesses that already serve local and destination markets.
5. There is limited competition for the Hispanic market within Alexandria or in neighborhoods immediately surrounding the trade area.
6. As a marketing niche, Latin-oriented businesses provide a starting point for further income diversification and expansion in the captured market base. For example, family-oriented restaurants and entertainment, which appeal to strongly-knit Hispanic families, also hold appeal outside of the Latino market.
7. Highlighting specific cultural strengths (rather than a generic “diversity”) helps create character, in the form of a unique business and community environment, that attracts people for the experience. Such specificity also helps emphasize the “funkiness” sought in the Task Force plan.

Development of this concept still recognizes the need to broaden the income and geographic market base to ensure that the business district captures its potential share of expenditure potential in the larger trade area. The basic marketing concept for Arlandria proposes to strengthen the district’s local Hispanic identity by building on the existing base, and then to gradually recruit new businesses that help to broaden the market to include higher-income Latinos and other households.

**Family Orientation.** Arlandria’s marketing would also be oriented to attracting families with children. One strategy for changing negative *perceptions* of crime is to enhance the assets, amenities, activities, and opportunities for children. A number of recommendations for programmed activities and recreation amenities are provided in this section to help address this issue. The recommended business mix builds on the opportunity for attracting families with the concept of an anchor family entertainment, restaurant, & recreation facility.

The family orientation is consistent with, and builds upon, the Hispanic identity marketing. These elements are used collectively as a base to market and manage the area, and to design and develop infrastructure.

**Health & Recreation.** Arlandria is blessed with exceptional but inaccessible recreation assets, as has been repeatedly recognized by the Work Group and consumers. This section provides recommendations for better utilization of these assets, which support the marketing of a family orientation for the business district. Specialty health & recreation retail-oriented uses are also supported in the market and help build on the emerging business niche being created by My Organic Market. In some other locations where MOM has located a store, there has been a major recreation or sport-oriented retailer (like REI) located in the same center. Even smaller, specialty sports stores (such as the suggested soccer store) can attract a broad range of destination shoppers from throughout the region (including the broad and “diverse” mix of international residents of Washington who love the game of soccer). This type of store could be further integrated into the family entertainment & recreation themes through restaurant, entertainment, and recreation facilities.

### **The Arlandria Name**

Arlandria is the traditional name used by both residents and outsiders to describe this neighborhood. There is logic and humor associated with the combining of the names for Arlington and Alexandria, and that combination also provides information on location. Some confusion does occur around the name “Arlandria,” which is sometimes misunderstood as “Our Landria.” This confusion can actually strengthen a sense of place by associating the name with something desirable and tangible for a community. There is even the sense that the name sounds as if it is also a Spanish derivative, further strengthening the conceptual opportunities for marketing and advertising.

Unfortunately, there have also been negative connotations associated with the Arlandria name, most of which are traceable to the crime issues that plagued the area in the recent past.

While this name has merit in the positive image that it portrays and its association with a local planning area, it is not likely to soon replace the easily-remembered “Arlandria” name in common parlance. Arlandria, thanks to its simplicity and derivative nature, is a powerful word that is completely unique to this area. Upper Potomac West, by contrast, is a long name that could be easily confused with many areas in the Washington region (such as Potomac, Maryland or other areas along the Potomac River), and there is the presumption that there must be an Upper Potomac East and a “Lower” Potomac West. More importantly, Upper Potomac West (which is abbreviated to the unimpressive UPW) does not have the humor, power, or simplicity for marketing purposes of an “Arlandria.” Therefore, it is highly recommended that marketing efforts keep to the recognizable Arlandria name.

### **Business Mix** (See Section 3)

The interim business mix in Section 3 is recommended based on the market potentials and overall marketing concepts. The purpose of these recommendations is to identify specific types of stores to target for expansion or to recruit to the area to help strengthen and diversify the business mix. As discussed in terms of concept and identity, these new and existing businesses would accomplish this by:

1. Building on existing and potential destination market for Latin-American- and Asian-oriented food, restaurants, and specialty goods.
2. Enhancing Arlandria's appeal as a destination for family-oriented shopping, recreation, dining, and entertainment.
3. Building on Arlandria's existing and emerging health & recreation assets, including Four Mile Run Park, CVS, My Organic Market, and a pedestrian-oriented environment.

### **Design Recommendations**

Urban design is a key element of destination marketing for urban commercial districts. A number of well-informed design-oriented recommendations were made as part of the initial Task Force plan and the subsequent Work Group effort for the Mt. Vernon Avenue corridor. Design guidelines and projects should build on and reinforce the marketing concepts and maximize marketing potentials. Several general recommendations in this regard are provided below. However, a thorough architecture and design program and plan should be established for the area.

**Building Façades.** The urban design plan should assess the architectural and heritage significance of buildings and recommend approaches for highlighting key buildings. The Task Force recognized the vintage art deco architecture in some of the buildings. Deco is an appropriate architectural style to incorporate into the concept-driven marketing for the area (and is preferable to more typical colonial Virginia styles). Several buildings, such as the Mt. Vernon Village Center and the "Wafle (sic) House" have high-profile locations and are informed by post-deco architectural styles.

There is no need for creating an artificial consistency in the existing or future architecture of the area. Rather, marketing would focus on deco or other architectural highlights. Buildings that do not fit the "mold" for this style of architecture only help make the area more interesting and diverse. Façade improvements should concentrate on painting, display windows, and other physical improvements that make the area more attractive as a whole. However, façade improvements should be made for several key anchors to highlight their unique attributes. In particular, every effort should be made to encourage exterior

improvements to The Birchmere, to increase its visibility and highlight its presence in the district.

Building façade programs should also focus on the Safeway-Datatel site buildings (as discussed in the previous section) and on other commercial buildings surrounding the Mt. Vernon Avenue / Glebe Road intersection. For the most part, these buildings are poorly designed and do not relate to the intersection.

The City should incentivize façade improvements in the area, such as through low-interest loans and grants. These incentives should also be rolled into an overall marketing & redevelopment package that can be used for recruiting specific types of stores to the area. Other incentives can include the fast-track restaurant or other development approvals as discussed by businesses.

**Vacant Buildings.** The City and community have created specific plans for long-term redevelopment of the Safeway-Datatel site. As an interim strategy for the office building, the City plans to demolish the Datatel Building and construct a surface parking lot. The parking lot is an interim use to help alleviate the current parking shortage until a future parking garage is constructed. There should be programmatic use of this space that might also include community events, such as a weekly Arlandria Flea Market.

The former Safeway building is leased but the building and parking lot still project a negative image at the entrance to Arlandria and on the commercial district's prime retail intersection. The owner will be making improvements to the building as part of an agreement with the City.

**Streetscaping & Landscaping Design.** The community groups have also considered issues relating to streetscape. Again, design efforts should include ways to support and enhance the marketing concepts for the area, rather than focusing only on generic design solutions. The urban design plan should address the following:

1. People-Watching Areas. Clustering of street trees and sidewalk furniture to provide shaded places for families and friends to sit, visit, and people-watch.
2. Avoid Generic Fixtures & Banners. Avoid generic awnings and banners that provide color but do not serve to reinforce an identity.
3. Avoid Conflicting Styles. Avoid investing in hardware such as light fixtures or lamps that are decorative, but conflict with the basic marketing concepts. With long-term investments, care should be taken to avoid major statements and rather to focus on simplicity and consistency.
4. Incorporate flags, banners, and gateways that reinforce Latin American identity and the diverse international character of the area. Flags or banners from all of the Latin American countries could be incorporated

into the streetscape. Some cities have integrated national flag designs and colors into street hardware itself, such as gateways, light poles, and even sidewalks, while others simply fly the flags on poles. Chicago's cultural identity program is one of the best national models for neighborhood ethnic identity marketing through urban design features.

5. Incorporate public art into the streetscape, but only if such art is directly related to the marketing concepts and especially if designed or built locally. An excellent opportunity exists for the City to elicit designs by children from throughout the area, and/or to incorporate children's designs into public art (or into gateways and other public infrastructure as well).

Many cities have integrated ceramic tiles made by children into public sculptures, some of which can also be used for play (such as large dragons or castles onto which children can climb safely). This approach reinforces the marketing concepts and is a great way to involve families in the literal re-building of the commercial district in such a way that they have a sense of pride and a desire to return and shop in the area.

Particular attention should be focused on design issues at the Mt. Vernon-Glebe Road intersection, which forms the primary entryway into Arlandria and the commercial area's most visible corner. Identity gateways, pedestrian amenities, and traffic improvements at this location are critical.

**Parks & Open Space.** Arlandria has an exceptional asset in Four Mile Run Park. All of the Work Group's vision plans reiterated the need to "open up" access to the park and to better utilize this asset. At least three options have been presented for creating better access and visibility for the park from Mt. Vernon Avenue. This is critical for a number of reasons, not the least of which are:

1. The park is underutilized in part because it is not visible or easily accessible.
2. The park is perceived to be unsafe because it is not visible.
3. The park is an opportunity for creating more "people space" and pedestrian use within the commercial district.
4. Arlandria's consumers and residents frequently mention the need for more green areas and open space within the commercial district.
5. To reinforce all of the marketing concepts for the area - family, Latin-American community, and health & recreation. In some ways, the park itself is the intersection of these marketing concepts. The park should be better utilized as an amenity for marketing the commercial district.

Public Plazas. An urban design plan should more thoroughly address the issue of where and how to increase park access. It is recommended that whichever plan is approved for increasing access to the park, the access routes should avoid breaking up intact commercial rows and reducing commercial



density (instead focusing on reducing vacant and pad sites at the ends of the district). Access plans should also consider ways of creating structured public spaces reminiscent of plazas in Spanish countries. Several of the plans already promote this concept, and these can be further developed.

Four-Mile Run Facilities. The City has determined that Four-Mile Run Park offers adequate recreation facilities to meet the needs of area residents. However, as elsewhere in this section, there are opportunities for utilizing this amenity for marketing the commercial district and for increasing the interplay between the business areas and the park itself. Any additional park and recreation facilities that promote this objective should be identified and further examined in this context.

**Signage.** Signage is critical for identifying the area and, as in any advertising, solidifying name recognition. Certainly there should not be competing names for the area recognized through individual stores or public infrastructure. Members of the Work Group suggested that signs might include Spanish, as well as English, names. This is not uncommon in marketing ethnic commercial districts. One only has to visit Washington's Chinatown to see the bilingual signage (along with gateways and façade improvements) used for pro-active destination marketing.

Directional Signage. There should be directional identity signage facing both ways on South Glebe Road, indicating the location of the Arlandria business district. If Arlington County will not allow the signage, then there should at least be identity signage at the entrance to Alexandria, across Four Mile Run. (The City's "welcome" signs should be placed closer to the actual border). Similarly, there should be directional signage for Arlandria along West and East Glebe Roads.

Gateways. The Work Group has already recommended gateways, such as at the Mt. Vernon Avenue / Glebe Road intersection. Any gateways should reinforce the marketing concepts and identity for the area.

Store/Center Signage. As of July 2002, neither of the two shopping centers in the district had a permanent sign identifying the name and tenants within the center. Several stores have confusing signage that doesn't clarify the type of store or merchandise sold. Centers, stores, and restaurants need to have proper identification signage. It is not recommended that signage necessarily use identical designs or materials in the district. Rather, the diversity of the businesses should be accommodated.

There should be some incentives for retail businesses to upgrade their signage, as other urban design improvements are implemented. In doing so, retailers would be encouraged to incorporate some specific elements that help reiterate the marketing concept (such as use of national flags, Spanish language,

or the word “family” on their signs). At the least, retailers should be encouraged to utilize the Arlandria name on their signage, either as an address or where appropriate as part of the name of the business. The urban design plan would include a signage program guide.

### **Anchor Recreation Amenity**

There are opportunities for additional capital recreation facilities at Four-Mile Run Park that could be wrapped into the overall capital project portfolio in support of the commercial district’s marketing concepts. Public investments in active recreation facilities (such as a small soccer stadium) could be marketed in concert with the family entertainment center, restaurant, and related retail uses, to become a *regional destination attraction for Alexandria*. Long-range parks planning should incorporate efforts to acquire more parkland to accommodate destination-oriented family-oriented recreation activities, such as the soccer stadium.

### **Advertising and Promotions**

There are many opportunities for outreach through promotions and advertising in order to broaden the market for Arlandria. It is recommended that advertising focus on the key marketing concepts of Latino community, family-orientation, and health & recreation. Advertising should utilize humor to build recognition for the unique and quirky Arlandria name.

As urban design improvements and management initiatives enter full swing, an outreach program should initially focus on programming (as described below), in concert with direct promotions to potential consumers outside of Arlandria but within the immediate trade area. These promotions can take the form of mailings with coupons for selected retail stores. Additional mailings should target middle class and affluent Latino households throughout northern Virginia, Washington, D.C., and Maryland. Gradually, this outreach effort would be expanded to reach the broader market through advertising in regional publications.

### **Programming**

Events programming is the key component for initiating a successful marketing campaign for Arlandria. Events and other “soft” activities help generate interest and name recognition that gradually carries into business recruitment and marketing. Events also help solidify and refine the marketing concepts for the district. Initial recommendations for events include the following:

1. **Regional Soccer Matches & Training Camps.** Regular amateur and annual invitational matches held at Four Mile Run Park. Retailers and restaurants would run promotions in concert with the event. Seasonal



training camps sponsored by the City's Parks & Rec department could also be held at the park.

2. **Family Outdoor Movie Nights.** Arlandria residents and consumers strongly desire some type of affordable, family-oriented entertainment activity, preferably a movie theater. The area does not have the location or the market to support a cinema. A pro-active recruitment effort will be required to attract a family entertainment center. Until that time when an entertainment facility is built in Arlandria, there is the opportunity to host a variety of regular entertainment activities including a weekly community movie night in summer. This event might be held at the park as part of an effort to increase overall utilization of this amenity and to attract people from outside of Arlandria on a regular basis. Arlandria restaurants would co-sponsor the event or run promotions in conjunction with the films (such as a free soft drink if you show your movie stub).
3. **Alexandria Latino Americano Street Festival.** Alexandria hosts several major Scottish heritage events, including the Scottish Games and the Annual Scottish Christmas Walk. There are also events for black history month, in addition to the annual Juneteenth Commemoration. The City and the Tenant and Workers Support Committee sponsor the annual Arlandria Chirilagua Festival, held at Four Mile Run Park. This festival should either be re-oriented as a street festival or a second street festival developed, with more focus on the retail district. Mt. Vernon Avenue should rightfully take its place as the commercial heart of Alexandria's strong and diverse Latino community, which already represents 15% of the City's population.
4. **Folk/Cultural Music Festival.** Either as part of the Latino Festival or as a separate event, Arlandria could eventually play host to a music festival. Ideally, this festival would be promoted and sponsored in part by The Birchmere. The festival might feature Latin music, as well as a broad selection of other cultural music styles including American folk and bluegrass artists brought in by Birchmere.
5. **Weekly Flea Market.** The recommended mix already calls for a regular flea market that can showcase the community's assets and expose new customers to Arlandria. This market would be an excellent interim use for the Datatel site should that building be demolished, or for the Safeway parking lot. The flea market would be advertised in regional newspapers and magazines, and also included in information distributed to Crystal City hotels.

## **Summary**

The marketing strategy should focus on the strengths of the Arlandria area and its near-term potential. A marketing concept has been developed that promotes the Latin-American community, family-orientation, and health & recreation assets. These elements are closely aligned and well-represented in the recommended business mix.

Design improvements will play a critical role in helping to increase the overall competitiveness of the commercial district for capturing a larger share of trade area demand. A detailed urban design plan should include strategies for signage, public art, parks and public spaces, streetscape, and building facades that are consistent with the marketing concepts.

Initial promotional efforts should focus on soft, programmatic activities including events and mailings to broaden and increase regular visitation to the area. The City and its Parks & Recreation department have an important role to play in enhancing the accessibility of Four Mile Run Park and in adjusting the mix and type of recreation facilities to better respond to community needs and market opportunities. The park and commercial district can be co-marketed through programmed events such as soccer matches, music and cultural festivals, and family entertainment.

## **Management & Redevelopment**

The Task Force Report obviously provided guidance on redevelopment, especially at the Safeway-Datatel site and several other key sites. The following strategic recommendations focus on interim redevelopment and management issues within the district prior to redevelopment of these key sites.

## **Traffic & Circulation**

Traffic and circulation have clearly been identified as serious issues, especially at specific choke points in the district. As discussed in Section 1 of this report, it is urgent for the City to address safety issues near the Mt. Vernon Village Center with improved pedestrian crossings and traffic management.

There has also been the suggestion of a roundabout or traffic circle to help slow traffic and improve safety at the Mt. Vernon Avenue/ Glebe Road intersection. A traffic circle at this location could also be encouraged as a marketing tool, since it sets the area apart and recognizes entry for a distinct area. This element could strengthen the marketing concept, with traffic circles being sometimes associated with Latin American and European cities. However, this association is not always a positive relationship.

An urban design plan should incorporate the results of traffic management studies to reduce conflict, but should also seek to ensure that traffic is slowed through the area and pedestrian access is enhanced.

## **Redevelopment**

The district's key redevelopment sites are already planned (Safeway-Datatel) or recently redeveloped (Mt. Vernon Village Center and Shops on the Avenue). As a result, short-term (interim) redevelopment opportunities are limited to a few small sites scattered throughout the district.

The recommended mix in Section 3 calls for the addition of 30,000 to 50,000 square feet of net new retail space in the next five years. In addition, it was also recommended that several existing businesses be relocated within the district. Many of the existing storefronts are too small to be marketable for competitive uses and the rents charged are sometime out-of-sync with the quality and size of the space. There is a need to create larger, more competitive retail spaces in the district to accommodate growth among existing stores and to attract new businesses.

**Lack of Anchor Sites.** Key potential anchor uses cannot be easily accommodated on the existing sites, outside of the Safeway-Datatel site. Several of these potential anchor uses are described below.

Latin Grocery. One of the key market mix recommendations was the relocation and expansion of the district's most popular and profitable grocery store, La Feria Latina. This 1,900 square-foot store and its 720-foot sister operation (La Feria del Pescado) could serve as an important destination anchor for the community if they were consolidated and expanded in a larger, more appropriate space where the store could offer a full-service line of specialty groceries and meats. Ideally, this store would be accommodated on the site of the former Safeway building, where it would occupy about 10,000 to 12,000 square feet alongside other specialty stores. However, that building is already leased on an interim basis and the long-term vision plan calls for large-scale redevelopment. Consideration should be given to incorporating this business as the grocery component of the Safeway-Datatel redevelopment project.

Another option would be to occupy some of the still-vacant space in the Mt. Vernon Village Center. There would possibly be some synergy between the two specialty grocers, which as separate entities serve different markets, but in the same center help attract a specialty food niche market. Here it is unlikely that the landlord will rent space for another grocer in this center. Another option would be for La Feria to relocate into another large existing space if one becomes available in the district. Alexandria Economic Development Partnership (AEDP)

should assist in tracking space as it becomes available in Arlandria and negotiating on behalf of La Feria for a larger space with parking.

Family Entertainment Center / Restaurant. There is market support for a moderately-sized family entertainment center and restaurant. However, there are few appropriate redevelopment sites available for this 14,000+ square-foot combined use. Ideally, this use would have a central location or have direct access to recreational facilities at Four Mile Run Park.

**The Birchmere Site.** Several of the alternative vision plans call for retail development on the back of The Birchmere and/or redevelopment of The Birchmere's parking lot(s) for retail use. Conceptually, these ideas are logical as they help create additional space that opens either onto a new plaza created on the site of the Mt. Vernon Village Center, or onto Mt. Vernon Avenue itself. In reality, development of this retail would require The Birchmere to become a primary participant in a mixed-use development surrounding their building. Several of these vision plans would also require another wholesale redevelopment of the shopping center, which is unlikely to occur in the near future.

Development adjacent to The Birchmere would potentially include uses that may not be considered compatible with the music venue from a marketing standpoint, such as a family entertainment center and Latin grocery. An alternative may include development of the retail space for a large destination music store, similar to the concept for the Latin music/CD/software store with café service. If such a store were to include a *broader* range of cultural music styles, there may be an opportunity for encouraging The Birchmere to participate even as an active or silent partner. Such a development would help create synergy with My Organic Market (MOM) and other businesses that would cater to a multi-cultural destination market.

For this type of development to occur, the City would need to take an active role in promoting and encouraging participation by The Birchmere. Owners of the music venue could potentially participate in development, operating, and/or promoting the project and its retail businesses.

**Demolition- Datatel/Houses.** Other options for creating new retail space include demolition of freestanding buildings, houses, and/or older retail space in the corridor. The four former residential properties and two vacant lots located on either side of the Datatel office building would have provided an excellent opportunity for redevelopment, since these units are not competitive for commercial use and they are low-quality, low-density structures in what should be a high-density section of the commercial district. Ideally, these units would be demolished and new retail project developed that provides space for La Feria, a music/book/CD store, and/or a family entertainment complex. However, these

smaller sites are part of the larger Safeway-Datatel site reserved for long-term development.

An alternate opportunity for redevelopment of a portion of the Safeway-Datatel site would allow for the demolition of the office building and all adjacent former residential properties for development of the family entertainment center (et al), including the concept of the public parking structure. This would be considered as the *first phase* of what could (but is unlikely soon to) become the larger mixed-use project developed on the Safeway & bank sites. The project would potentially also incorporate the houses at 3802 and 3800, as well as the National Computer Warehouse building (3706) to create an even larger site. Thus, development would be phased starting north of the Safeway-Datatel site on properties adjacent to RT's, as a continuation of the existing high-density commercial district.

### **Zoning and Incentives**

Redevelopment within Arlandria should be encouraged through flexible zoning and fast-track approvals for particular uses to be encouraged within an overlay district. Financial incentives for small projects might include a community-revitalization tax abatement, façade & other capital grants, and low-interest loans. For larger projects like a Birchmere retail development or a first phase Safeway/Datatel project, it is in the City's interests to provide assistance with land assembly, tax abatements or other fiscal incentives, and possibly a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district for financing parking or other public infrastructure in support of such projects.

The City's primary role in capital investment, however, is in implementing public improvements as would be recommended in urban design and traffic plans. As noted in this report, design can have a critical impact on marketability, but only if sensitive to the needs of the community and if supportive of the potential target markets.

### **Other City Assistance**

The Alexandria Economic Development Partnership (AEDP) should also be participating in recruitment efforts to elicit participation by existing property owners (like The Birchmere's) and attract developers for projects as described here. AEDP would also work with the business association in recruiting the types of retailers recommended in this report as part of the appropriate mix.

As discussed earlier, the City's Parks and Recreation department have a vital role to play in enhancing Arlandria's existing park asset. The City should identify opportunities for creating destination recreation facilities with physical and marketing linkages to the Arlandria commercial district. Long-range park planning

efforts should consider the addition of parkland to accommodate additional active recreation uses.

### **Merchant Association**

There is an active merchant association in the Del Ray / Potomac West area that has some minimal participation by businesses in Arlandria. There is also a smaller business group within Arlandria. It is strongly recommended that the Alexandria Economic Development Partnership (AEDP) increase its direct Spanish-speaking outreach to Latino-owned businesses as well as outreach to Asian and other businesses in Arlandria, to increase participation in Arlandria's business group.

The Arlandria business group should focus on creating an organizational development plan that aims to maximize participation by both businesses and property owners. The group should then design and establish a marketing and promotions plan based in part (or all) on the recommendations in this report. The development of this business group into a larger, more participatory organization, may require more extensive handholding by AEDP.

As the group becomes more established, it is suggested that members consider the option of establishing a Business Improvement District (BID) that collects an annual levy at a rate and in support of such activities as are agreed by the members. The levy would form one or several sources of income in support of appropriate activities that might include:

1. Cleaning services
2. Part-time security
3. Events management
4. Marketing & promotions
5. Merchandising assistance

### **Merchandising Audits and Plans**

In the interim period, it is essential that the Alexandria Small Business Development Center (SBDC) work with Arlandria businesses on an individual basis to strengthen their merchandising strategies. At present, there are many businesses in the district with potential for strengthening their appeal to existing customers and for attracting a broader customer base if only the appropriate marketing and merchandising strategies were in place. Many existing Arlandria businesses would benefit from having SBDC in an advisory role to assist in the following:

1. Conducting a merchandising "audit" that examines the business's current floor plan, merchandising, and marketing strategies.



2. Providing input and recommendations on improving store layout, pricing, and merchandising (perhaps also with concepts for joint supply and delivery opportunities).
3. Providing template packages and assistance for developing two-year and longer-term business plans.
4. Providing input on marketing and advertising budgets.
5. Providing information and recommendations on Small Business Administration (SBA) loans and other funding sources for working capital or other gap financing to improve merchandising, add stock, or make capital improvements.

## **Summary**

There are major issues for traffic management, redevelopment phasing, and organizational development in Arlandria that need to be addressed. A more thorough traffic management plan should be developed that considers such issues as traffic circles, signaling, and pedestrian access as part of a comprehensive review of the need for improvements along Mt. Vernon Avenue.

Redevelopment opportunities during the interim period are limited unless there is consideration given to joint development of Birchmere properties or a phased approach for redevelopment of the Safeway/Datatel site. The former would consider development of a destination music retail store & café concept as part of a Birchmere complex. The latter would consider redevelopment of houses, vacant land, and the Datatel office building site for a new retail center. This center would possibly include a destination-oriented family entertainment venue, restaurant, expanded / relocated Latin grocery, and/or other specialty shops. In order to accommodate this center, it is recommended that the redevelopment plan for the Safeway-Datatel site incorporate a smaller scale, first phase project starting north of the site.

The City, AEDP, and the SBDC each has an active role to play in encouraging redevelopment, marketing, and improved merchandising in the Arlandria business district. Traffic improvements, urban design improvements, business association strengthening, merchandising and marketing audits, developer and business recruitment, recreation facility access, and event programming are among the highest initial priorities for the Arlandria commercial district in order to enhance the long-term redevelopment potential in the area.

## **List of Key Year 1 Actions**

The following list provides several specific actions that can be taken within the next 12 months for implementation of strategic marketing, management, and redevelopment initiatives within the Arlandria Commercial District. Specific actions are listed below, along with the responsible party. It will take time for the business environment in support of redevelopment to improve (through marketing & promotions, visibility, and design programs).

### Focus: To develop and strengthen a Marketing and Promotions organization

Technical assistance from Neighborhood Planning and Community Development division (NP&CP) of the City's Department of Planning and Zoning and the Alexandria Economic Development Partnership (AEDP)

Establish Focus Group including:

Potomac West Business Association  
Arlandria Business Association  
Tenant and Workers Support Group  
Arlandria Businesses  
Other targeted groups or individuals

Activities of Focus Group to:

1. Initiate intensive business organization development process.
2. Create Organization, Outreach and Fundraising plans for the organization. The Outreach Plan should focus on increasing and broadening membership.
3. Draft three-year Marketing & Promotions plan, utilizing the concepts and information provided in this report. As part of the plan, examine opportunities for distribution of coupons, newsletters, and promotional materials to households in the larger trade area.
4. Assess opportunities for operating weekly Arlandria Flea Market and Summer Movie Nights, on a trial basis
5. Complete three-year plan for operations of Flea Market, Movie Nights, and other promotions on a regular basis.
6. Coordinate with the Alexandria Chamber of Commerce, and Convention and Visitors' Bureau on business participation and on events planning and promotions, especially for expansion and re-orientation of an annual city-wide Latino street festival that would be held in Mt. Vernon Avenue (and with additional activities in adjoining Four Mile Run Park).
7. Coordinate and communicate with property owners to ensure buy-in.

8. Working with NP&CD, begin to examine opportunities for a Business Improvement District (BID) or mechanism for funding joint marketing, capital improvement, and management initiatives. This should only be considered once the business association has a critical mass of members, perhaps 50% of all Arlandria property and business owners and operators.
9. Initiate discussions with The Birchmere on increased exposure within the commercial district, increased local marketing, and on opportunities for site development and better use of underutilized property.
10. Working with NP&CD, initiate discussions with stakeholders (including property owners) with regards to phasing for the Safeway-Datatel site redevelopment, including the concept of a Phase 1 development that includes the grocery and/or family entertainment anchor and other businesses as indicated in this report. Test interest among property owners in joint-venture marketing (with AEDP) of the Phase 1 project to prospective developers. The City would prospectively offer development of structured parking to leverage such investment as part of a mixed-use project.

Focus: To strengthen individual business plans and merchandising strategies

Alexandria Small Business Development Center (SBDC), with assistance as needed from AEDP and the Chamber of Commerce

1. Conduct merchandising audits with individual businesses and provide input on store layout, merchandising, operations, and marketing strategies.
2. Provide assistance in the development (or revision) of 3-5 year business plans for individual independent businesses (not for franchised businesses).
3. Provide Small Business Association (SBA) loan package information and other financing information for individual businesses to invest in capital improvements, or for working capital and marketing.
4. Ensure coordination with AEDP in communicating information about Alexandria's small business assistance programs to existing business owners in Arlandria.
5. Coordinate with AEDP and Arlandria's business association on establishing a monitoring system for individual business plans, re-merchandising, and individual store marketing & promotions. The monitoring system should encourage cooperative efforts among the various businesses, such as in tracking merchandising changes, establishing joint promotions, improving signage & marketing, and extending hours of operation.

Focus: To incorporate commercial district marketing concepts into park planning

City of Alexandria Recreation, Parks & Cultural Affairs (RP&CA) in coordination with Neighborhood Planning & Community Development (NP&CD)

Examine and prioritize proposals to enhance access to Four Mile Run Park.

1. Examine and prioritize proposals for public plazas as urban active spaces that are incorporated (or open) into Four Mile Run Park.
2. Identify additional land for potential expansion of Four Mile Run Park, as part of mid-term and long-term park planning. This land might be “created” through redevelopment of existing underutilized buildings or parking areas.
3. Identify potential opportunities for new or expanded *active* recreation facilities (such as a small soccer stadium or recreation components of a family entertainment center) in Four Mile Run Park or the area that are consistent with the overall marketing concepts for the commercial district.
4. Coordinate with AEDP and the Marketing and Promotions organization on planning for weekly events and festivals that incorporate both the park and the commercial district.

Focus: To implement recommended traffic improvements

City of Alexandria Transportation and Environmental Services (T&ES)  
in coordination with NP&CD

1. Review traffic management plans for area to ensure that the proposed improvements will alleviate existing congestion issues and improve pedestrian access and safety.
2. Identify and examine appropriate traffic improvements necessary to improve access for Four Mile Run Park.
3. Establish timeline for specific traffic improvements
4. In coordination with NP&CD, re-examine potential for traffic circle at Mount Vernon Avenue and Glebe Road, in the context of a more comprehensive urban design plan.

Focus: To encourage the implementation of urban design improvements and redevelopment projects that incorporate the recommended interim marketing concepts

City of Alexandria Neighborhood Planning & Community Development (NP&CD)

1. Coordinate with AEDP on establishing a basic City policy for examining the “return on investment” from neighborhood design and other capital improvements. Establish framework for any further improvements or investments in Arlandria.
2. Re-examine need for structured parking facilities in Arlandria as an interim measure, as opposed to implementing less-costly streetscape and other design improvements.

3. Incorporate target-marketing concepts into the urban design plan (currently underway) and determine costs for urban design improvements. As the City completes the plan, prioritization should be given to incorporating the marketing concepts through:
  - a. Use of public art that builds on the specific strengths of the community. Participation by area children or families in design or construction is recommended.
  - b. Use of street furniture that responds to particular community needs and marketing. Design and grouping of street furniture to accommodate family gatherings, etc.
  - c. Use of public plazas (as already proposed) and other public areas as a central element for marketing the business district and for creating access to Four Mile Run Park.
  - d. Gateways, street signs, and other public “hardware” that are consistent with the marketing concepts in their design, siting, and implementation.
  - e. Recommendations for façade improvements and other physical improvements for private building owners and businesses to implement. Such improvements would be designed to maximize the development of the marketing concepts. (See #6, below). Specific recommendations for such improvements should be illustrated and shared with property owners and businesses.
4. Incorporate alternative concept for a phasing approach (Phase 1) redevelopment of the Safeway-Datatel site, including the proposed parking.
  - a. Review phasing concept with stakeholders.
  - b. Working with AEDP, examine potential for utilizing structured parking (or other public improvements – see #5) as an incentive for leveraging Phase 1 development.
  - c. Pro-actively establish appropriate regulatory framework (zoning, fast-track approvals, etc) in support of any redevelopment of this site or within the commercial district as a whole.
5. Determine specific further urban design improvements City will make to leverage private investment.
6. Working with the marketing and promotions organization and AEDP, review the Mt. Vernon Avenue design standards and propose new overlay design standards that respond more specifically to the marketing concepts for Arlandria. These standards might incorporate recommendations for a *menu* of appropriate materials, signage styles, etc.
7. Provide AEDP and the marketing and promotions organization with recommendations for specific design improvements for individual buildings and streetscaping that might be funded in part through City loan programs or through a potential Business Improvement District (BID).